

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION PM-03

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LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR TS

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN GOVT'S NEED FOR MORE ARMS

REF: (A) TUNIS 7659 (B) TUNIS 0046

1. DURING MEETING WITH MINISTER-DIRECTOR OF PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, CHEDLI KLIBI, ON OTHER SUBJECT FEB 8, KLIBI BROUGHT UP MATTER OF ADDITIONAL ARMS NEEDED BY TUNISIA FOR WHICH USG ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN REQUESTED (REF B). HE WENT OVER SAME GROUND COVERED EARLIER WITH ME BY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE RE TUNISIA'S NEED FOR ADEQUATE MILITARY DETERRENT IN LIGHT OF DEVELOPING THREATS FROM LIBYA AND ALGERIA. HE SAID TUNISIA'S MAIN EQUIPMENT NEEDS ARE FOR MODERN GROUND-TO-AIR AND GROUND-TO GROUND WEAPONS.

2. I STRESSED OUR DIMINISHING MILITARY ASSISTANCE RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY MAP GRANT. I NOTED THAT ONLY HANDFUL OF COUNTRIES ARE RECEIVING MAP GRANT, INCLUDING ONLY ONE OTHER NATION IN AFRICA (ETHIOPIA). IT IS FOR SPECIAL POLITICAL REASONS THAT MAP GRANT IS CONTINUING TO BE FUNNELED INTO SUCH COUNTRIES AS ISRAEL, JORDAN, SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. NEVERTHELESS, I INDICATED POSSIBILITY OF AN INCREASE IN AMOUNT OF FMS CREDIT WHICH MIGHT BE FURNISHED TUNISIA.

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3. KLIBI PICKED UP MY ALLUSION TO "SPECIAL POLITICAL

REASONS" AND CONTENDED THAT TUNISIA WARRANTS BEING PLACED IN SIMILAR CATEGORY. IT HAS LONG SHARED SAME IDEALS AND GOALS AS U.S. AND HAS BOLDLY IDENTIFIED ITSELF WITH U.S. ON ISSUES AND AT TIMES WHEN IT WAS HIGHLY UNPOPULAR TO DO SO. SURELY, U.S. ATTACHES SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO MAINTENANCE OF TUNISIA'S INDEPENDENCE.

4. I CONCURRED THAT USG VALUES ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH TUNISIA AND WOULD BE VERY CONCERNED IF TUNISIA'S INTEGRITY WERE THREATENED. DIFFERENCE, HOWEVER, IS THAT IN CASE OF FOUR COUNTRIES I HAD CITED EACH IS FACING MORE IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS. IN CASE OF ISRAEL AND JORDAN, OUR AID IS LINKED TO A CRUCIAL MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATING EFFORT. FRANKLY, I CONTINUED, USG WOULD PROBABLY TAKE VIEW THAT THREATS TO TUNISIA EXIST MORE IN THE FUTURE THAN IN THE PRESENT. URGENCY HERE IS OBVIOUSLY LESS.

5. KLIBI AGREED THAT URGENCY IS LESS BUT SAID TUNISIA MUST START IMPROVING ITS MILITARY POSTURE NOW IN ANTI-CIPATION OF THE FUTURE.

6. I CALLED ATTENTION TO EXCESSIVELY HIGH COST OF REQUESTED TUNISIAN PACKAGE. KLIBI REPLIED THAT PRIORITIES COULD BE SET AND ONLY MOST IMPORTANT ITEMS COULD BE ORDERED AT FIRST. I SAID I HAD ALREADY REQUESTED CHUSLOT TO ESTABLISH LIST OF PRIORITIES IN COORDINATION WITH GOT. KLIBI THOUGHT THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA.

7. I STRESSED IMPORTANCE THAT GOT ALLOCATE A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF ITS OWN FUNDS FOR PURCHASE OF NEW EQUIPMENT DESIRED. KLIBI SAID GOT WOULD INDEED CONTRIBUTE ITS OWN FUNDS BUT GOT RESOURCES ARE LIMITED. I MENTIONED TIME LAPSE OF 3 - 5 YEARS IN DELIVERY SCHEDULES BUT I OBSERVED THAT IF WE ARE IN AGREEMENT THAT "THREATS" TO TUNISIA ARE MORE IN FUTURE THAN AT PRESENT, THIS SHOULD NOT RPT NOT POSE GREAT PROBLEM. KLIBI MADE NO COMMENT.

8. COMMENT: I TRUST THAT IN ACCORDANCE WITH MY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN REFTELS WASHINGTON IS LOOKING
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FOR WAYS OF INCREASING U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO TUNISIA BOTH IN FORM OF MAP GRANT AND FMS CREDIT. TUNISIA HAS A GOOD CASE FOR BEEFING UP ITS MILITARY POSTURE, AND IT IS IN OUR INTERESTS TO HELP AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. I HOPE IN THIS CONNECTION THAT AN EARLY VISIT TO U.S. BY MINISTER OF DEFENSE KHEFACHA CAN BE ARRANGED.
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